



THE BRITISH DONJEK GLACIER EXPEDITION 2002

MEF Reference 02/31

EXPEDITION REPORT

A mountaineering expedition to the Canadian Yukon

25th May to 19th June 2002

Supported by : The Mount Everest Foundation
The British Mountaineering Council

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Introduction

This expedition was planned to make first ascents of unclimbed peaks on a side glacier of the Donjek glacier system of the Canadian Kluane National Park.

Extremely remote and with access problems that lay completely in the hands of the glacial pilots, this glacial system remains to this date unvisited.

The summer ascents of the smaller peaks in the range are very similar in undertaking to climbing in the Western Alps in winter.

This report describes the expedition that made five first ascents of peaks and climbed three new routes on other peaks in the range.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks go to all the individuals, companies and organisations that helped us.

Our thanks to the following organisations that supported us :

The Mount Everest Foundation
The British Mountaineering Council

Objectives and summary achievements

Objectives

To make the first ascents of unclimbed peaks on the Donjek glacier system in the Canadian Yukon.

This original objective was abandoned due to glacier pilot from Ultima Thule landing two members on the wrong glacier and then becoming banned from Canadian air space. Alternative objectives were found on the Eclipse glacier by the two persons dropped and then after in the Granite Range by the four man team.

Summary achievements in order :

- 1st ascent of Peak 3390 metres by the South East ridge - Eclipse glacier
- New route on Peak 3330 metres by the North West ridge - Eclipse glacier
- 1st ascent of Peak 3320 metres by the East face - Eclipse glacier
- New route on Peak 2450 metres by the West face - Goat glacier
- 1st ascent of Mt Lola by the South West ridge - Goat glacier
- 1st ascent of Mt Jennifer by the West face - Goat glacier
- 1st ascent of Mt Zaylie by the West face - Goat glacier
- New route on Peak 2570 metres by the South West ridge - Goat glacier

Team members

Geoff Hornby (GH)

The expedition leader and planner. Prior to this expedition, his last 6 expeditions to Alaska or the Yukon have received the generous support of the MEF and the BMC. During this time he has made the following ascents :

- a. The 1st ascent of Point 9070 on the Kahiltna Glacier
- b. The 1st ascent of Thunder Mountain (the last major unclimbed peak in the Central Alaska range) on the Kahiltna Glacier.
- c. The 1st ascent of the East face of Benign Peak in the Chugach range (& in winter).
- d. The 1st British ascents of the SW ridge of Mt Hunter.
- e. The SE ridge of Mt Crosson.
- f. The 1st ascent of the Central Spur on the West face of Wood Peak in the Yukon.
- g. The 1st British ascent of the Lowe route - Keystone Greensteps in Valdez.
- h. A new route in winter on the West face of Sukakpak in the Brooks Range.
- i. The 1st ascents of Mt Tassles and Mt Sholes on the Fake Peak glacier.
- j. The North face couloir on Mt Barrill

In addition to this, Geoff has led five Himalayan expeditions, the highlights of which have been the 1st ascents of Laspa Dhura, Nandakhani & Nandabhanar and repeat ascents of Tharkot, Tharpu Chuli and Chung Xang.

His alpine record includes the first free ascent and in winter of the Direct start to the Supercouloir, the 1st British ascent of the Lalidererspitze North face direct, the Walker Spur, the Matterhorn North face, Piz Badile North East face, Marmolada South face.

Winter ascent of the Diamond couloir direct on Mt Kenya, a winter solo of the Ice

Window route on Mt Kenya and the 2nd ascent of Behemoth on the East face of Kishtwa Tembo, he has made over 100 first ascents in Wadi Rum, the Western Hajar mountains of Oman and Setesdal in Norway.

His big wall experience includes ascents of the Nose, Zodiac, Watkins South face and the NW face of Half Dome (in a day) in Yosemite and the Troll Wall in Romsdal.

Glenn Wilks (GW)

A Lake District based climber with the following expeditions and peaks to his record:

- a. Bobshehir - Pakistan - Team climber
- b. Manaslu 8163m - Team climber
- c. Bolivian Andes - Ascent of Chaupiorco Norte - 1st British ascent
- d. Bolivian Andes - Ascent of Illimani
- e. 3 summer seasons in the French Alps, 3 winter seasons in the French Alps
- f. Tour Ronde - North face in winter
- g. Chere couloir - North face in winter
- h. Extensive record of Scottish winter ascents. Most of the classic Grade 5 ice routes
- i. New water ice routes in Norway on North face of Tvietsfjellet
- j. 5 summits above 4000m in the Atlas mountains.

Susan Sammut (SS)

A Derbyshire based climber with ascents of the following peaks to her record :

- a. Ascent of Orizaba in Mexico
- b. Ascent of Tharpu Chuli in Annapurna sanctuary
- c. 1st ascent of Chung Xang in Tibet
- d. Mt Athabasca in the Rockies
- e. Snowpatch spire, Bugaboo spire and Pidgeon spires in the Bugaboos
- f. Petit Bargy North face direct in the French alps
- g. 100 1st ascents of long rock climbs in Jordan, Oman, UAE and Norway.

Alistair Duff (AD)

An Edinburgh based climber with the following expeditions and peaks to his record:

- a. Ran the inaugural Everest marathon
- b. Ascent of Chulu East in Nepal
- c. Ascent of Bhagirathi 2 in India
- d. Ascent of Kagmari 1 in Nepal
- e. Attempt on Nojin Kansa in Tibet

Diary

- 25.5.02 Flew to Anchorage via New York with Continental
- 26.5.02 Bought food and organised gear, stayed at Earth B & B
- 27.5.02 Bus to Chitina and flight into Ultima Thule lodge
- 28/29/30.5.02 Bad weather at lodge
- 31.5.02 Flight into Donjek failed, dropped on Eclipse glacier, pilot stuck in snow all afternoon
- 1.6.02 GW and GH climb 1st ascent of Pt 3390 via SE ridge and new route on Pt 3330 via the NW ridge
- 2.6.02 Snowing
- 3.6.02 GW climbs 1st ascent of Pt 3320 via East face
- 4 to 8.6.02 Snowing. SS and AD drive from Chitina to Kluane to collect GW and GH
- 9/10.6.02 GH escapes to Kluane, GW stuck on Eclipse glacier
- 11.6.02 GW escapes to Kluane, 4 members drive back to Chitina
- 12.6.02 Ultima Thule fly 4 into lodge at 06.30, flight into Goat glacier at 1600. GW, GH & SS climb new route on Pt 2450 via East face. Summit at midnight.
- 13.6.02 Intermittent snow and rain
- 14.6.02 Weather clears in morning, GW & GH make 1st ascent of Mt Lola via SW ridge
- 15.6.02 Intermittent snow and rain
- 16.6.02 GW makes 1st ascent of Mt Jennifer via the West face
- 17.6.02 All 4 members make 1st ascent of Mt Zaylie via the West face
- 18.6.02 Intermittent snow and rain
- 19.6.02 GW & SS make new route on Pt 2570m via the South West ridge, flew back to Chitina lodge
- 20.6.02 Flew from Chitina Lodge to Chitina and bus to Anchorage
- 21/22/23/24.6.02 Sorting gear in Anchorage and visit to Seward
- 25/26.6.02 Flew back to the UK

ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES

The members of the team were involved in no accidents during this expedition.

Alistair Duff's climbing and mobility was seriously reduced by a preexisting back injury.

ACCESS AND TRAVEL

Fly to Anchorage, easiest via New York - 20 hours.

Access should be very easy to the Donjek glacier according to Ultima Thule - the glacier pilot based in Chitina, Alaska. Their bus collects you in Anchorage and drives you to Chitina village air strip. Paul Claus of Ultima Thule collects you and flies you to his lodge further up the Chitina river.

From there you can fly into any destination in the St Elias range, the Wrangells or the Canadian Ice fields park.

However, during our expedition a serious row erupted between the Canadian flight providers based in Haines Junction and Kluane and Ultima Thule. Essentially Ultima Thule are not allowed to service the Canadian commercial market from a base in the Alaska, but to date the glacier pilots have all worked peacefully and allowed each other to fly across the borders.

In 2002, several large contracts were up for grabs for servicing scientific expeditions on the glaciers of the Wrangells and the Ice Fields park. Ultima Thule's new single turbine engine Otter is without doubt the most powerful beast in the area. It can land much more easily on skis than a twin engine Otter and has more power to weight such that it can land at 15,000 feet in locations such as King col.

The scientific expeditions wanted to use Ultima Thule for this reason but the Canadian customs insisted that all materials had to check through customs in Canada first. Of the three scientific expeditions on the Canadian side, one used Ultima Thule whilst the other two used Canadian glacier pilots. The contract for Ultima Thule was lucrative.

Halfway through the contract, the Canadian glacier pilots complained to their respective enforcing agents and it transpired that Ultima Thule was operating without the necessary permits.

Ultima Thule were then banned from landing in Canada subject to the ensuing investigation.

How did this screw up our trip?

GH and GW flew into the Donjek from Chitina in the Ultima Thule Otter. The visibility on the Donjek was visibly too poor to fly in that direction and land so Paul dropped us on the Eclipse glacier. The intention was to pick us up again when he flew in with the other 2 members of our expedition.

My logic on being dropped on the Eclipse rather than being flown back to Chitina was:

- a. I was unsure if the pilot intended to charge us for an aborted flight and I did not think it smart to start that discussion in mid flight,
- b. being dropped on the Eclipse might give us some climbing and some acclimatisation prior to flying into the Donjek. In fact we made the 1st ascents of 2 peaks and climbed a new route on a third.

After returning to Chitina, Ultima Thule were informed that they were banned from Canadian air space for the foreseeable future. This presented us with a number of serious problems:

- a. GH and GW were on the wrong glacier in Canada
- b. SS and AD were stuck in Chitina lodge and could not fly in to join them
- c. GH and GW could not be collected from the Eclipse glacier by Ultima Thule.

Also on the Eclipse glacier was a scientific expedition who agreed to allow GH and GW to fly out to Kluane on their Twin Otter once their work was finished. In return for a free flight, they asked GH and GW to assist in loading the aircraft for them.

It took GH and GW 7 days of bad weather before they were able to fly out to Kluane. SS and AD had meantime borrowed Ultima Thule's truck and driven the 550 miles around from Chitina village to Kluane.

Once the 4 team members were reunited, they then drove the 550 miles back to Chitina after running the gauntlet of driving an illegal vehicle in Canada and returning through USA immigration despite the fact that GH and GW had not seemingly left the USA.

Once back at Chitina village, Ultima Thule collected the team and flew them back to the lodge where they had to make a snap decision on a new location to fly to. The SW fork of the Goat glacier was chosen as it was close and provided reasonable flying conditions.

In retrospect we lucked out, as the peaks on the glaciers on either side had been explored by climbers from Ultima Thule or the American Alpine Institute, and we were able to make the 1st ascents of 3 peaks including the dominant and very attractive Mt Lola and to also climb new routes on 2 other peaks.

Whilst the situation with respect to Ultima Thule's access into Canadian air space is still fluid, it is not realistic to make recommendations on methods of access in a report that may be read in 10 years time. For further detailed advice please contact the glacier pilots direct or this expedition leader by telephone.

EQUIPMENT

The following set of equipment was the basic set used by each of the four climbers :

CLOTHING

Polartec thermals
Polartec fleece jacket
Helly Hansen fleece salopettes or similar
A lightweight down duvet
A single or two piece Goretex shell
Vapour barrier socks
Warm socks
Plastic boots or single leather boots
Supergaitors
Fleece balaclava
Down booties
Inner gloves
Wool gloves for technical climbing
Pile lined over mitts

SLEEPING

4 season sleeping bag.
3 sleeping mats, either Foam or Thermorests.
Antarctica dome tents.

COOKING

White gas MSR's with kettle and stainless steel pan sets.
A thermos is essential for keeping liquid overnight and simplifies brews on the glacier or on routes.

CLIMBING

Clip on crampons. Normal technical ice tools.
Standard harnesses.
2 ice screws and 2 snow stakes per person.
60 metre 8.2 millimetre ropes.
Slings and tape.
Scottish mixed rack for harder climbing.
Snow shovels, one shovel should be lightweight.

FOOD

Standard food, nothing fancy or clever, all bought or buyable at a Safeways in Anchorage.

EXPENSES

TRAVEL	to Anchorage : £675	= £ 675
	Anchorage to Ultima Thule return : \$1000	= £ 715
	Food : £125	= £ 125
	Satellite telephone : £20 each	= £ 20
	Hotels and transport around Anchorage	= £ 90

SUB TOTAL = £ 1625 per person

TOTAL = for 4 persons = £ 6500

This trip was financially supported by significant contributions from :

The Mount Everest Foundation to whom we are eternally grateful
The British Mountaineering Council to whom we are eternally grateful.

CONCLUSIONS

Access problems created by the glacier pilot caused the original objective to be changed to two other objectives. However, five peaks received their first ascents and three others were climbed by new routes, continuing the pattern of British exploratory involvement in these mountain ranges.

It is my firm intention to return to the Donjek glacier in 2003, accessing the glacier from Kluane on the Canadian side.

Anyone requiring further information on this expedition, or on how to mount an expedition such as this, or would like to discuss some objectives in these ranges are very welcome to contact Geoff Hornby as follows :

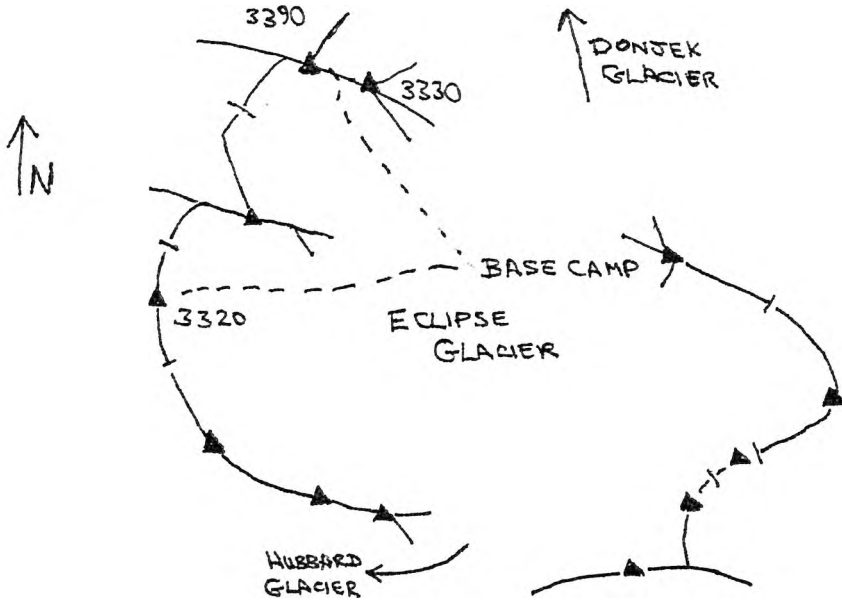
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Accompanying maps with routes marked :

1. Eclipse glacier.
2. Goat glacier.

ECLIPSE GLACIER

Located on the divide between the Hubbard glacier and the Donjek glacier systems.



SOUTH WEST FORK OF THE GOAT GLACIER

Located in the Granite range of the St Elias National Park.

